



Jimmy Carter Library & Museum News Release

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Novelists to Speak and Sign Books at Carter Library

Ron Rash & Martha Witt to Discuss Works on Friday

ATLANTA, GA.- Authors Ron Rash and Martha Witt will discuss their novels "Saints at the River" and "Broken as Things Are" at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum Friday, July 29th. The 8 p.m. lecture and book signing is free and open to the public.

The Atlanta Journal Constitution calls their works "worth celebrating." AJC book editor Teresa Weaver wrote.....

Life is a long string of absolutely ordinary days punctuated by the odd, occasional dramatic moments. We get up, we go to work, run errands, balance the checkbook. And then tomorrow we get up and do it again. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Many good fiction writers will tell you their greatest challenge lies not in capturing the momentous events of a life but in doing artistic justice to all the small and quiet ones.

In this particularly noisy summer --- the shock and awe of the Harry Potter juggernaut --- writers of smaller, lyrical fiction are worth celebrating more than ever.

Ron Rash's second novel, "*Saints at the River*" (Picador, \$14 paperback), a beautifully crafted tale of death and environmentalism (seriously), recently won the top fiction award from the Southern Book Critics Circle. Set in South Carolina, the book brims with silent, pitch-perfect moments:

"After death, everything in a house appears slightly transformed --- the color of a vase, the length of a bed, the weight of a glass lifted from a cupboard. No matter how many blinds are raised and lamps turned on, light is dimmer. Shadows that cobweb corners spread and thicken. Clocks tick a little louder, the silence between seconds longer. The house itself feels off-plumb, as though its foundation had been calibrated to the weight and movement of the deceased."

Rash, 51, grew up in the Appalachian foothills, where his family line extends 250 years. Now a teacher of Appalachian studies at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, N.C., he knew very early that he was a writer, long before he had the vocabulary to express that.

"I knew that I was seeing the world a little bit different from everyone else," he says by telephone. "It seems like I was always noticing things, and I remember just kind of feeling a little bit alien."

At age 5, he remembers, he asked his grandfather to pick up where his mother had left off reading aloud to him "*The Cat in the Hat*."

"My grandfather could not read or write," he says. "But he was a proud man, and he didn't want me to know. . . . So he started turning the pages and telling a story. What was so amazing about his story was that it was different from my mother's, and every time he read it, it was different.

"It just kind of gave me this idea about words being magical."

Writers are, by nature and by practice, much better observers than other people. Whether they're seeing the way somebody wears his clothes or the deeper details of a family dynamic, writers notice and remember far more than most.

Martha Witt's debut novel, *"Broken as Things Are"* (Picador, \$14 paperback), is an extraordinarily nuanced portrait of family dysfunction and obsession. The story centers on Morgan-Lee, an adolescent girl who shares a secret language with her brother, Ginx, who has a high-functioning form of autism known as Asperger's syndrome.

Like Rash's, Witt's fiction is steeped in years of poetry writing, with all the lyricism and efficiency of language that entails:

"Aunt Lois had always maintained that beauty was a question of shadows," Witt writes, "so she took it personally that my face was blank as a stretch of desert. Even as a baby, I had not been beautiful."

Witt, 37, lives in New York City but grew up in Hillsborough, N.C., in a 180-year-old house in a neighborhood full of houses that had long since been abandoned.

"There were old shoes and old clothing and old letters scattered around," Witt recalls. "I always felt like there were all these people's stories all around me."

From such stories and details, scattered around a life, comes an uncanny fictional insight.

"When he looked at our mother, our father's face was nothing but smiling and patient," Witt writes. "'Your father is a patient man,' our mother would exclaim, but the way she said it took patience down a notch below other virtues. 'So patient,' she would repeat. He kissed her cheek, and it was clear how completely they misunderstood each other."

Amid the sticky heat and glaring light of summer, a moment of quiet.

Following the lectures, Ron Rash and Martha Witt will sign copies of their novels. Doors for the 8 p.m. lectures open at 7:30 p.m.